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## Volume 24 Issue 2 Introduction

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# From the Guest Editor



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Jane is a graduate of Mills College and the University of British Columbia iSchool. She has worked for the Crook County Library in Prineville, Oregon since 2013, and has been the Assistant Director there since 2016. In her spare time, Jane is an avid cartoonist and digital multimedia artist. It is Jane's personal and professional goal to be the manager at the Sesame Street branch of the New York Public Library.

## *Lots of Ways to Be a Leader Or: I Am a Library Leader, and So Can You!*

People tend to have a fixed mindset about who “librarians” are and how library staff should act, represent their profession, and lead. When I say “people,” I am envisioning every public official, captain of industry and Lyft driver who has ever asked me how many people I shush in a day, and then I am envisioning a rain of cartoon anvils. To be fair, I’m also thinking of a younger version of myself, picking out the dowdiest clothes in my wardrobe for my first day as a circulation clerk at my college library.

At that point I had no aspirations towards a career in libraries. From my outsider’s standpoint—and, as the child of two librarians, a relatively informed outsider’s standpoint—librarianship was for quiet people who loved to enforce rules and approached the things that made my life worth living (popular culture, comedy in all its forms, spicy food) with a magnifying glass and tweezers, if at all. I failed to see the connection between the librarian in my head and the person I was, or the person I was going to this women’s college to become: a badass, social-justice-warrior, take-no-bull lady dynamo. The kind of person who makes *things happen* (what things? I don’t know! *Things!* I was 18!), and who probably also wears magenta blazers with shoulder pads and pointy jewelry you could weaponize in a melee.

As I looked at myself in my “librarian uniform”—black cords, red polo, not realizing how much I looked like a Target employee—I thought to myself, “eh, I can be this person for three hours a day if it means I can get a non-cafeteria meal once in a while.”

Thirteen years and many burritos later, I’m still a loudmouth slob who routinely cracks wise and writes policies galore but enforces the only rule that makes sense to me: *don’t be a dick* (Wheaton, 2007). I’m also the Assistant Director of Library Services at Crook County Library, and someone who wears the title “librarian” with pride. I got here through the guiding example of peers and bosses who showed me that “librarian” is not synonymous with “lame-o” and that in fact the best library leaders—the ones who do the most to effect positive change in their institutions and their communities—are the ones who

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embrace their strengths and dreams without compromise. This was the central thesis around which the inaugural Leadership Institute of the Oregon Library Association (LIOLA) was built, but it wasn't entirely news to me.

My transformation into a librarian began the same day I put on my schlub disguise and set off for my first day at work. Turned out, the only other people at the library who were dressed for retail were also froshies with brand new work-study placements. Everybody else looked like themselves, and they looked like they belonged. I realized immediately that this was due to the efforts of the head reference librarian, Michael. Michael wore crushed velvet smoking jackets and clashing bow ties à la Duckie in *Pretty in Pink*. He DJed at scuzzy weirdo clubs on the weekends and challenged patrons and staff to “cutesy battles”—reach in your pockets, pull out whatever you have strategically planted there (perhaps a Happy Meal toy or a sheet of Sanrio stickers), and may the cutest doodad win.

My first thought upon meeting Michael: “This is the coolest dude in the world.” Later, I came to realize that the qualities that made Michael a cool dude also made him an excellent librarian and a world-class leader. He was passionate about forging rich connections between the library-as-institution and the college community at large. By being himself, he let students know that they could be themselves in the library, too. People weren't afraid to approach library staff, or to ask for reference help—something that a lot of academic libraries struggle with. They also weren't afraid to give voice to their own interests and quirks; these conversations resulted in the development of an eclectic browsing collection that kept people coming back even when they didn't have a paper due the next day. It was a rich, friendly, cozy place to be—kind of a little slice of Sesame Street on a Paper Chase campus. I was hooked.

In this issue, you'll find more stories of librarians who, by leading from their individual strengths, have made their libraries, communities, and the Oregon library community better places to be. Jane Corry and Elaine Hirsch kick off this issue with a discussion of the planning and coordination that went into the first LIOLA, and how their own strengths—as defined by the Gallup StrengthsFinder assessment around which the LIOLA curriculum was based—influenced and guided that process. Hillsboro's Courtney Gill writes about how a collaborative, compassion-driven leadership model, combined with strategic outreach partnerships, produced the HPL Cares series of community service-based library programs. Mark Richardson talks about how he has employed the four-stage Situational Leadership model and his own supportive leadership tendencies in helping his Teen Council discover their strengths. Julie Gaida, acquisitions specialist at Pacific University and the head of a department-of-one, discusses how she overcame the insular nature of her position and made lasting connections with the campus community and her fellow Oregon librarians. Finally, librarians who want to exercise leadership from a non-administrative or non-supervisory position will find much wisdom in Melissa Little and Dawn Marie Lowe-Wincentsen's articles; both address how “followers” can, with confidence and authenticity, be agents of change. Melissa's article might even help you get into a titled leadership position, which is pretty cool work if you can get it.

This rambling introduction concludes with a full-hearted endorsement of the program that inspired this issue of the *Quarterly* in the first place: LIOLA. LIOLA is essential for





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every librarian or library-adjacent person who has ever wondered if their style of leadership (or not even leadership, necessarily; just their style of being a person in the world) makes them an asset or a liability to their community. I just described *you*, didn't I, you imposter-syndrome-having basket case!? Even if you are a world-class weirdo, LIOLA will teach you how to recognize, celebrate, and then mobilize your unique strengths for the betterment of your library and your universe, and to recognize, celebrate, and mobilize the unique strengths of others. You'll also get to meet other cool library-types from across the state and get one-on-one advice from bonafide mentors in the field.

And guess what—some of those mentors are even world-class weirdos themselves! If that doesn't convince you that library leadership is within the grasp of anyone who knows how to use their powers for good, I'll eat my pointy jewelry.

### References

Wheaton, W. (2007, August 27). *Wil's finale* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK-H0epcfoQ>

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